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***RSA South and East Asia, Seoul, 2019***

Learning is always interesting, but internalising what you learn is always a challenge. Having specialised in anti-bribery law in a very challenging jurisdiction, India, and having studied one of the most stringent anti-bribery regimes, the FCPA, in the US, I was expecting to gain only a certain degree of practical insight into regional challenges at IACA's RSA in Seoul in 2019. However, what I witnessed was a 360-degree look at the issue of bribery, with a deep study of extremely relevant issues, which I find, surprisingly, easy to internalise, only because of the manner in which the IACA RSA was conducted.

When I applied to participate in the RSA, I wanted to understand how our region is addressing bribery concerns and defining the compliance dialogue – not just as a reactive measure but as a preventive measure. Speaking with participants, from countries like Bangladesh, China, Pakistan, Maldives, and Korea, I realised how so many of our challenges are similar due to cultural issues. At the same time, some of us had faced completely unique challenges depending on our core profession – law, government, activism or a sector expert.

From Drago Kos' session on the tangible benefits of compliance, to understanding the Fair Players Club in Korea, to the call for change in the approach from “tone at the top”, to “middlemen's echo of the tone from the top”, to observer bias in Pallavi Roy's session, to gaining tools to critique world corruption rankings – a whole new world was opened up to me. While I personally enjoyed the sessions by former Interpol members and prosecutors, due to a certain amount of familiarity in their approach, I was amazed at how the non-law enforcement speaker sessions were able to simplify issues and give me tools to contribute to the compliance dialogue in India. And most importantly, these lessons and learnings have found a voice in my head and approach.

While this quick internalisation surprised me, my biggest takeaway from the intensive sessions was to be open, to be a party to this dialogue, and use what I learnt in my practice of the law and as a compliance consultant, even when there are few players in the Indian anti-bribery compliance dialogue. Upon my return, I had a re-look at the tone of compliance programs one can draft, and I was much better equipped to localise global programs to the Indian context. For example, at a presentation I made to US businesses in India, I introduced them to the concept of “culturally compliant” in their compliance programmes, using the knowledge I gained at the RSA.

Lastly, IACA's 2019 RSA in Seoul allowed me to be a part of an international community. I was a part of this community in a smaller way before, through organisations such as TRACE (also represented on a RSA panel!). This again reiterates the need to engage on global principles in a regional context. This is not only much required, but entirely beneficial to all involved. I do hope to continue this association with IACA and the world anti-bribery community in a meaningful way.